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EA/LC - Mr. Mark Pratt

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INR/RSF/GE - Robert D. Hodgson

Position of the Lao - North Vietnam
Boundary at the Route 7 Crossing

1. You have asked the question "Where do the North Vietnamese consider the boundary with Laos to be in the vicinity of the Route 7 crossing?" We have examined the data available and find the question impossible to answer with complete authority. However, the evidence supports the location of the boundary at or very near where it is carried on U.S. (and French) maps. It should be noted that one report states North Vietnam has claimed Lao territory "near Nong Het."

Evidence Examined

- 1) U.K. Foreign Office -- Joint Research Department Memorandum--
The Frontiers of Laos. 1 December 1967 CONFIDENTIAL

"...In 1954 North Vietnamese forces occupied and claimed an area of Laos near Nong Et (Nong Het) (19° 30' N, 104° E)..."

This report is the sole one in our files making this explicit statement. I do not know upon what the report is based.

- 2) Vietiane T-1192, January 8, 1959 SECRET

"...Re alleged penetration of Xieng Khouang [province], ANL discounts police report Viet Minh force moving into Lao territory..."

The telegram concerns the juridical basis of the Laos-Vietnam boundary. It would appear logical that the Embassy, while discussing troop movements into Xieng Khouang province, would mention North Vietnamese claims in the area if they were known.

- 3) North Vietnamese maps BAN DO VIET-NAM, 1:1,600,000.
(1 inch equals 25.3 miles). 2 separate editions. 1964

This map, primarily a small map of Indochina, probably is intended for school or government use. The map is based on either (or both) the French 1:400,000 map series or the 1:2,000,000 Carte Routiere de l'Indochine, both of which were very inaccurate.

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The Director of the Lao National Geographic Service wrote, in analyzing the BAN DO VIET-NAM map, "...the very small scale and the absence of planimetric detail gives the boundary alignment a figurative rather than a rigorously exact value..." I concur.

Having said this, we have examined the map and find that the boundary alignment generally conforms to that shown on U.S. (and French) maps but does not coincide with it. Sop Hang ('A' on attached JOG(A) 1:250,000 sheet) is located barely within Vietnam while we show it barely within Laos. The longitudinal value of this place is $103^{\circ}50'$ on the Vietnamese map and $103^{\circ}52'45''$ on the U.S. maps. Assuming the village has not been relocated, the Vietnamese map places the boundary point about 2.1 miles to the west of that shown on our maps. In the center of the arc crossing Route 7, the Vietnamese map terminates the eastward trend of the border at $104^{\circ}03'$ while U.S. maps place the point at $104^{\circ}07'30''$. The Vietnamese map boundary here is approximately 5 miles to the west of the normal plotted position. The northern points of the arc, in contrast, are virtually the same.

Examining the relative positionings of Nong Het (in Laos on both maps) and Muong Sen (Muong Xen) (in Vietnam on both maps) to the boundary, we find that the towns are roughly 12 miles apart on a direct line. The boundary on the Vietnamese map falls at 25% of the distance between the two, i.e. 4 miles southeast of Nong Het. All U.S. and French topographic maps situate the boundary at 55% of the distance, i.e. approximately 6.6 miles southeast of Nong Het. If the exercise is valid, the North Vietnamese have displaced the boundary 2.6 miles northwestward. This distance bears a direct correlation to the 5-mile westward displacement noted above. The resulting line has been sketched in black on the cited JOG(A) 1:250,000 sheet attached. Note the line coincides with points on a ridge.

- 4) Captured North Vietnamese military map 1:200,000. Sheets F 48 XXXI, XXXII, E 48 I, II.

25X1

This sheet covers Laos west of 104° E. and north of $19^{\circ}20'$ North. The area is outlined on the attached 1:200,000 target chart (SECRET). The only Lao - Vietnamese boundary is in the extreme southeast corner of the map. The line has been traced on the cited target chart in red. Both the North Vietnamese and U.S. maps show the boundary in this area to be related to the Nam Mo (stream). Positioning of the stream is, however, slightly different as indicated by the locations of the boundary. The Route 7 position also varies; the Vietnamese map location is added in pencil. These differences could stem from the original mapping or from our photography of the Vietnamese map (we are using a photograph and not the original print.) In any case, the differences are not considered important, for in each case, the boundary is directly related to the Nam Mo.

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Since Nong Het is only slightly more than a mile from the eastern limit of the map, little may be gained in this critical area.

However, I think we may infer that the boundary (related to the stream) can not be in the position implied by the BAN DO VIET-NAM 1:1,600,000 map. This line (See JOG(A) 1:250,000) follows the ridge line west of the Nam Mo stream joining peaks 4206, 2493 and 5259.

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- 6) 1959 and 1965 exchanges of correspondence between Laos and North Vietnam concerning the boundary FBIS, Jan. 9, 1959 EEE 1-4, Lao Presse 2.200 of February 13, 1959 and News Release of the Royal Embassy of Laos, February 16, 1965

None of these exchanges of correspondence concerning disputes on the Laos - Vietnam boundary mention any problem in the area of Route 7. The all refer only to the territory west of the DMZ. If a dispute existed, logic would require that the Lao, at least, protest any Vietnamese claim in order that the Lao claim remain valid.

SUMMARY

It can not be stated with complete assurance that the North Vietnamese have not made a claim to Lao territory along Route 7. In fact, a U.K. Foreign Office report states that they have. However, the available evidence indicates to us that the boundary is close to if not identical with that shown on official large- and medium-scale U.S. maps of the region. It should be noted that we have no direct evidence, other than cartographic, for the correct alignment of the Laos-Vietnam boundary north of Keo-Nua Pass (18°23' North.)

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If the North Vietnamese do claim Lao territory, the claim obviously does not extend as far west as 104° or the line would show on the captured 1:200,000 map cited in 4) above. The ridge line of the 1:1,600,000 map is eliminated but the geographic location might be valid. This position would place the boundary three miles east of Nong Het at the Route 7 junction. This position is about 3 miles west of the location shown on U.S. maps. However, since the only basis for this boundary is the 1:1,600,000 map we do not give it much validity.

Attachments:
As stated.

INR:RSF/GE:RDHodgson:clh

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